

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN



NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: David Marin
(202) 225-5074

Davis: Mixed Results for Counter-Drug Effort in Colombia

Washington, D.C. – Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis (R-VA) issued the following statement upon the release of two Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports, “Security Assistance: Efforts to Secure Colombia’s Caño Limón-Coveñas Oil Pipeline Have Reduced Attacks, but Challenges Remain” (GAO-05-971) and “Drug Control: Air Bridge Denial Program in Colombia Has Implemented New Safeguards, but Its Effect on Drug Trafficking is Not Clear” (GAO-05-970):

“An important component of U.S. counternarcotics policy has been an integrated strategy to meet the challenges confronting Colombia. The Government Reform Committee has jurisdiction over the nation’s drug control policy and these two GAO reports, requested by the Committee, represent our ongoing oversight of U.S.–Colombian counternarcotics efforts and whether federal funds are being wisely spent on that endeavor. While these reports indicate that progress has been made in the struggle against drugs, many challenges still remain.

“Since the 1990s, the U.S. has operated the Air Bridge Denial (ABD) program in Peru and Colombia to interdict drugs air-transported by downing – sometimes forcibly – suspicious aircrafts. In 2001, the program accidentally shot down a legitimate civilian aircraft, which resulted in the death of two U.S. citizens. GAO found that the U.S. and Colombia have incorporated additional safety measures to avoid such incidents in the future. While the reduction in suspicious tracks may imply the program’s success in terms of reducing drug trafficking, GAO could not evaluate that claim due to the lack of objective benchmarks and performance measures. The U.S. plans to provide \$26 million for the program during the 2006 fiscal year. This amount is in addition to the \$68 million already funded for the ABD. If additional funds are to be spent, and I believe they should, the Committee believes that the Department of State should establish performance measures to accurately judge the program’s effectiveness.

“In the other report, GAO examined how U.S. funding and resources given to Colombia has helped it defend the Caño Limón-Coveñas oil pipeline, which transports almost 20% of that nation’s oil production, against insurgent groups. Since fiscal year

2002, the U.S. has provided almost \$99 million in training and equipment to minimize attacks along the first 110 miles of the pipeline, the primary area of attacks. GAO found that despite some equipment delays, the effort has reduced the number of attacks. Unfortunately, attacks are increasing in the area outside of the initial 110 miles where Colombian Army units have not received much in terms of U.S. assistance. Funding for the program will shortly expire and U.S. commitments in other areas of the world will severely reduce the amount of aid. The Department of State, in cooperation with DOD, should develop a plan to help transition the security of the pipeline to the Colombians.

“Colombia is not only one of the oldest democracies in our hemisphere, but it also is home to three terrorist groups who fund their guerilla activities with drugs smuggled into the U.S. for American consumption. Colombia is a significant source of cocaine and heroin for the U.S. market. The drug trade has a terrible and destructive impact on Americans through addiction, drug-related crimes, and death. Because drug trafficking and the guerilla insurgency have become intertwined problems, Congress has granted the U.S. expanded authority and increased flexibility to fight narcoterrorism and reduce the flow of illicit drugs into the U.S.

“I’ve led four congressional delegations to Colombia in the last few years and I can say firsthand that our significant investment, after years of effort, is beginning to see returns on the time, money, and resources spent in Colombia. However, as these GAO reports demonstrate, it’s not how much money we spend, but how well we spend the money that counts. The Committee will continue its vigilant oversight and ensure that U.S. tax-dollars are being effectively spent by executive agencies and Colombia. We’ve done a decent job so far in Colombia, but we can and should do better.”

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